Madrassi Madrigals

BY

V. H. SHIPLEY.

ILLUSTRATED BY

H. F. PRYNNE

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DEDICATION.

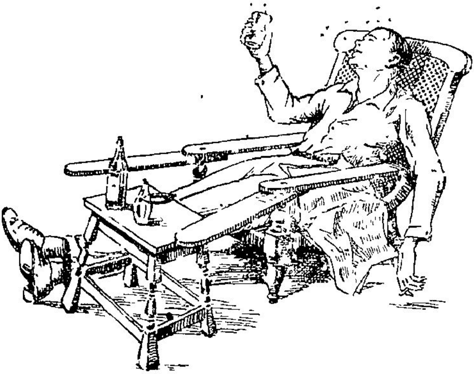
MADRAS

Clive kissed me on the mouth and eyes and brow,
  Wonderful kisses, so that I became
Crowned above Queens—a withered beldame now,
  Brooding on ancient fame.

The Song of the English
(The Seven Seas)

By the very courteous consent of
Mr. Rudyard Kipling.
October 1928.

PREFACE.

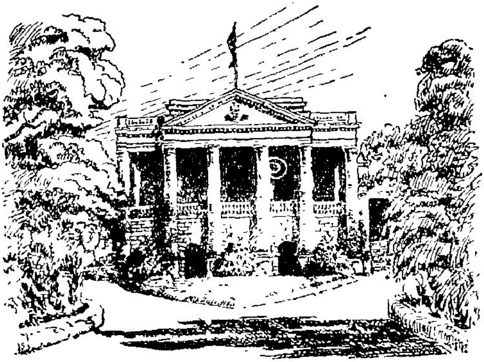


When malcontents abuse your glare,
  Your burning sun and blazing heat,
And dust to make the priesthood swear,
  All join in making life a treat,
Some friend should pen a friendly rhyme at
                Your climate!

And sometimes when the breezes die,
  Or when the sun is hot—or both—
A pious man, I often try
  To check the bad, blasphening oath,
And cease from throwing wordy slime at
                Your climate!

And having set myself the task
  To sing of one so in default,
I write these lines, but first I ask,
  You take them with a grain of salt,
And do not always think that I'm at
                Your climate!

MADRAS CLUB.



Bless the ever open door,
  Welcoming her exile members:
India's longest bar, that links
Spicy yarn with icy drinks.
  What our foster-home remembers
Of our elders gone before!

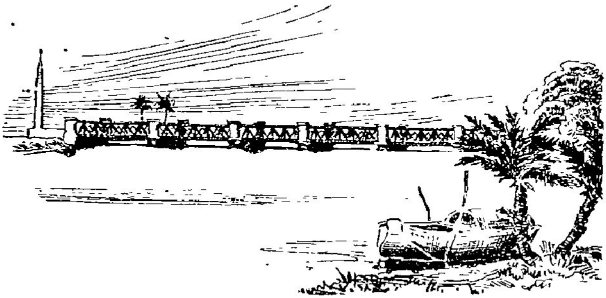
Hundred years of dignified,
  Proud and pleasant service earned
For past generations: serried
Ranks of former exiles buried:
  Dead and buried, but returned,
Helping us to keep her pride.

Could we moderns truly boast
  Atmosphere thus warm yet staid,
Were it not for wraiths that throng us
Moving in and out among us,
  Strengthening the home they made?
Past and Present! Here's a toast!

THE COOUM.

Of dirt and smell your sources wake
No promise; of the latter
Cherput has no complaint to make,
Nor Egmore—for that matter;
But thence each step accumulates
Some smell, that strongly carries
An odour that asphyxiates
The air round Bridge of Harris.

Chintadripet has ceased to fret
Or fight against the doom
That wraps the Island in a stench,
Peculiar to the Cooum.
And near the sea, where one would think
Your water might be cleaner,
It forms a cess-pit

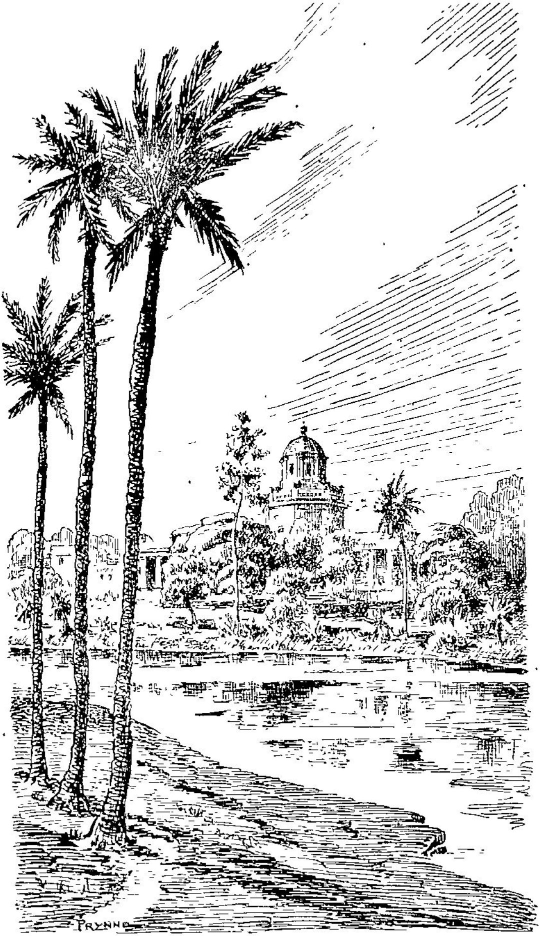


by the Bridge,
Adjoining the Marina.

Envoi:

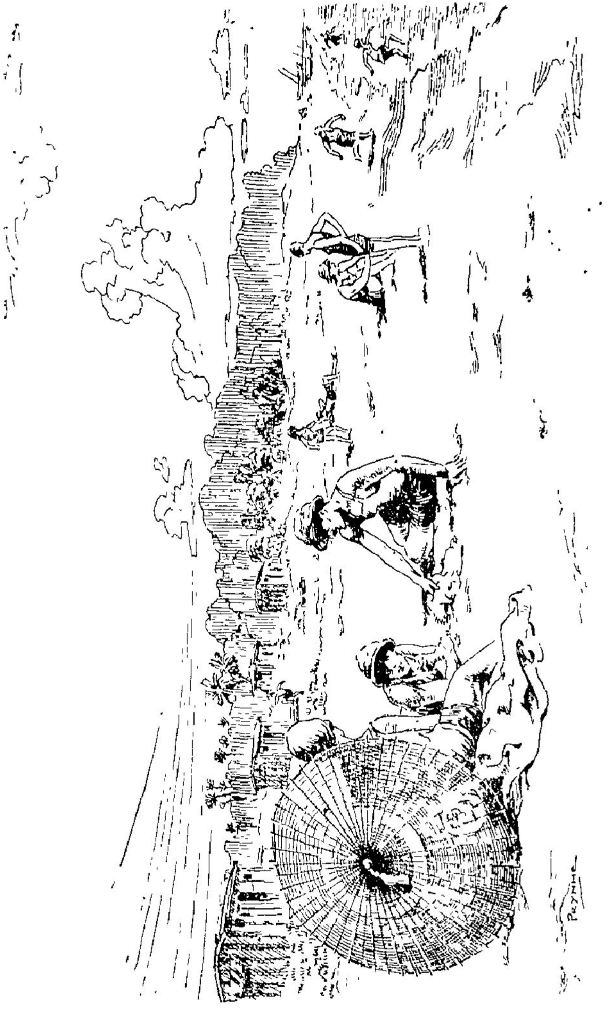
Oh, viscid stream! Oh, smelling flood!
Oh, green and beastly river!
In short you are the emblem of
A real Madrassi Liver!

THE ADYAR.


PRYNNE

When the palms and casuarina trees are thrown into relief
By the wizardry of evening, in her reign so sadly brief,
As the cloud-flecked sky is gloried in a myriad-tinted light,
And the voice of day is merging in the whispers of the night;
Only then, Madras, you capture for a golden hour at least,
Just that fleeting, all-elusive mystic wonder of the East!

ELLIOTT'S BEACH.



Oh! Elliott's Beach on Sunday
Has half a dozen reigns,
From early morn to afternoon,
And then until the rising moon
Reveals the sand discreetly strewn
With maidens and their swains.

Some horseman may come early

To exercise his steed,
Perhaps a bather—may be both;

But generally most sahibs are loth
To *rise*—upon the Sabaoth,
 Earlier than they need.

By noon the surf is dotted
 With bathers by the score;
And those with vanity concerned.
Who, from advertisements have learned
That handsome men are slightly burned,

Lie prone upon the shore.

Mixed bathing in the evening,
  Is quite the thing to do.
Some ladies, in their winsomeness,
Prefer the one-piece bathing dress;
And I—mere man—I must confess
  That I prefer it, too!

Oh! Elliott's Beach at night time,
  Can tell another tale,
But after all is said and done.
My word is no criterion,
And over all the goings-on,
  I draw a tactful veil.

VICTORIA HALL.

PRYNNE

The weekly dances have been found
To make a happy meeting ground,
For those who otherwise, I fear,
Would meet *sub rosa,* as it were.
Except on some days which are starred
For concerts, that are Promenade.

The dances start, as you'd expect,
With dignity and self-respect,
But later these oft disappear
In quite another atmosphere—
Created nine times out of ten
By cheerful military men!

To think the Merry Widow Valse
Once echoed round those stucco walls,

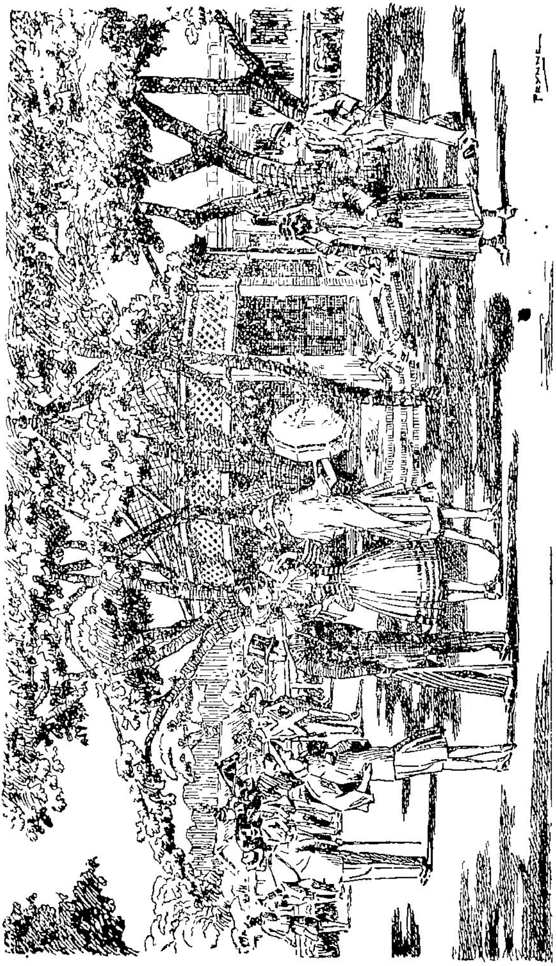
Where now
young men
to
ragtime notes

Do foxtrots in alpaca coats.

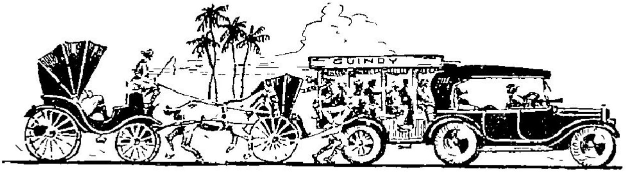
(And some of those, who partners take,
Don't always dance for dancing's sake.)

And others watch—but most are far
More interested in the bar.
One never really knows before
What kind of evening is in store.
The unexpected, after all,
Is just your charm, Victoria Hall!

GUINDY RACES.


PRYNNE

Jutka, bullock cart and bus,
   Bandy, rickshaw, gharry.
Motor, bicycle and train
   Any wheels to carry—
To carry all the followers of jockey and of horse,
Along the seven dusty miles from Georgetown to the course.

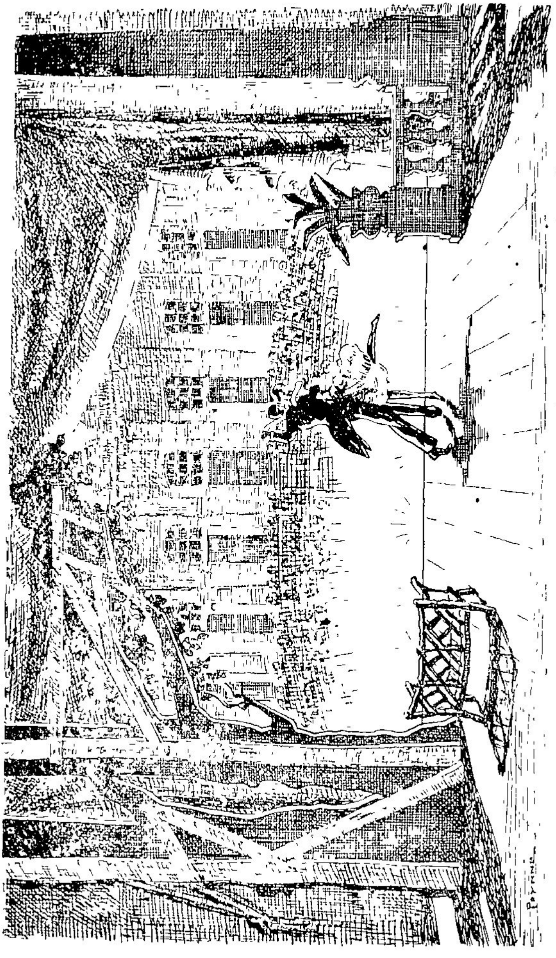


Oh! the thrill of making bets,
And then the thrill of waiting
Until they start. Then thrills on end
As the horses round the bend.
"There's a crash! Not mine, thank Heaven!"
"Come on Steve!" "What price eleven?"
"He's going up. . . . it looks a cert!"
"That brute behind has made a spurt.
Oh! Curse. . . . but still a dam' good race;
And anyway, I've got a place!"

Hindu, Parsi, Brahmini,
   Muslim, Malayalee,
Cook and matey, clerk, dubash,
   Peon and syce and mahli,
Crowding to the Guindy Races, fast as wheels will turn,
To spend in one short gamble, what it took an age to earn.

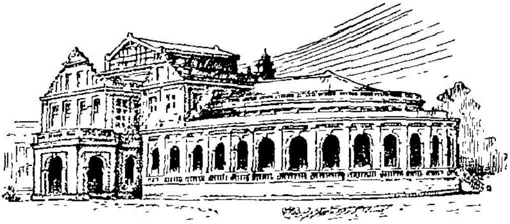
Europeans, Indians,
   Both are just as funny,
Bound beneath the self-same yoke,
   Gambling with their money.
The ladies merely go to see and show their "latest cries"—
The London new, the Molyneux—(if hubby knew the price!)

MUSEUM THEATRE.



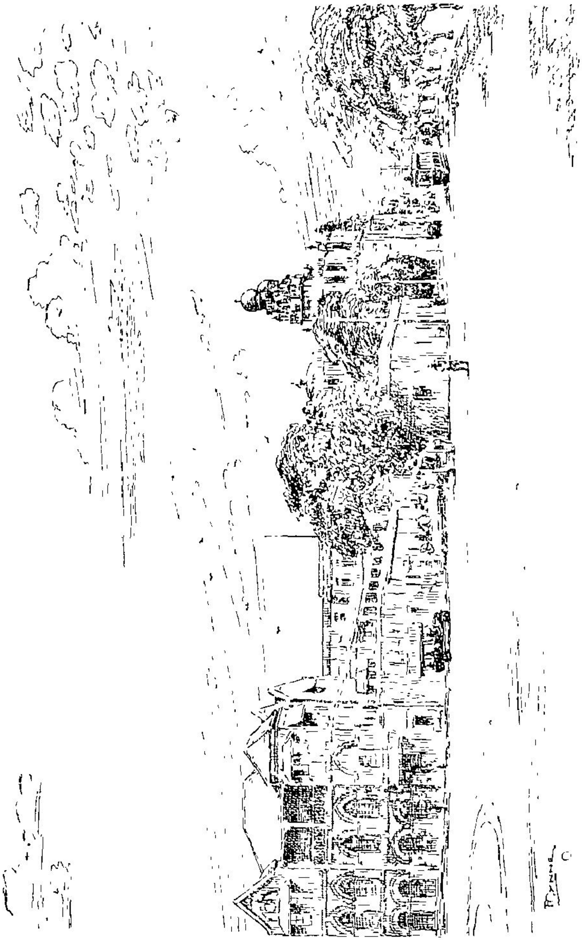
In this home of short-lived triumphs, that have had their
madcap day,
Bandycoots and bats in life run riot, and in death decay,
From the prompter's box re-echo drifts of half-forgotten scenes
That have passed within the ill-appointed bounds of these
demesnes.
Fly-blown doors, rotted floors,
Curtains torn, wings forlorn.

Amateurs who act for pleasure (less for friends' than for their
own)
Like themselves to best advantage, like their efforts ably
shown
In attaining this ambition, which one cannot call absurd,
Every means should be enlisted to have speech distinctly
heard.
Every word, should be heard,
Foul infliction—careless diction!



Good acoustics have been banished since the corner stone was
laid,
In this badly built rotunda clear-cut speech has been betrayed,
But the shackles of tradition prove too subtle to unfix.
And these keen, unpaid performers bravely kick against the
pricks.
Stub their toes, Heaven knows
Why they ne'er act elsewhere.

GEORGETOWN.



From the Harbour southward walk.
—If you scorn the use of gharries—
Turn into the Esplanade,
At the corner that is Parry's.

Then down Popham's Broadway amble,
(Though the chances are you'll hasten)
Till you reach the neighbourhood of
What is called the Bridge of Basin.

Thence a route directly seaward
Will complete a perfect square.
And the place within that border
Is the Georgetown workers' lair.

Georgetown! City of the Merchant,
Chetties' happy hunting ground,
Where the livelong struggle rages
For Rupee and British pound.

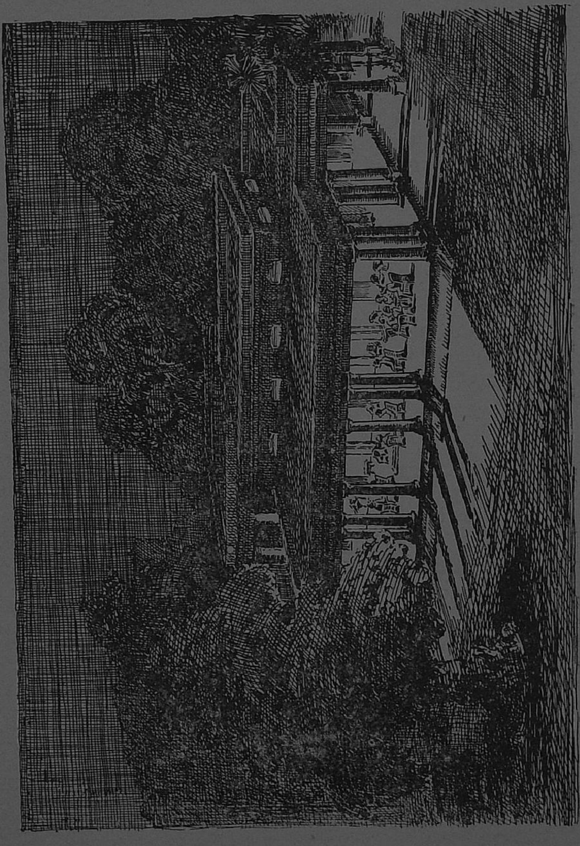
Every one intent on profit—
Burra Sahib, assistant, clerk.—
Every brain so keenly working
For the one magnetic mark.

Burra Sahibs have need for riches,
So that they may, as a rule,
Give their sons the education
Of an English Public School.

Most assistants want quick fortune
For the ease and comforts which
Only come so late in life to
Most of those who do get rich.

And the clerk needs all the money,
Which he can in reason get;
For twelve cases in a dozen
Show the clerk to be in debt.

THE DOVE-COT.



Here the sparks of idle chatter,
That some thoughtless husbands scatter,
Of some small and trivial matter,
Oft are whirled.
Whispers, which, if shrewdly fanned 'll
Breed a raging fire of scandal
Branding some Don Juan vandal,
To the world.

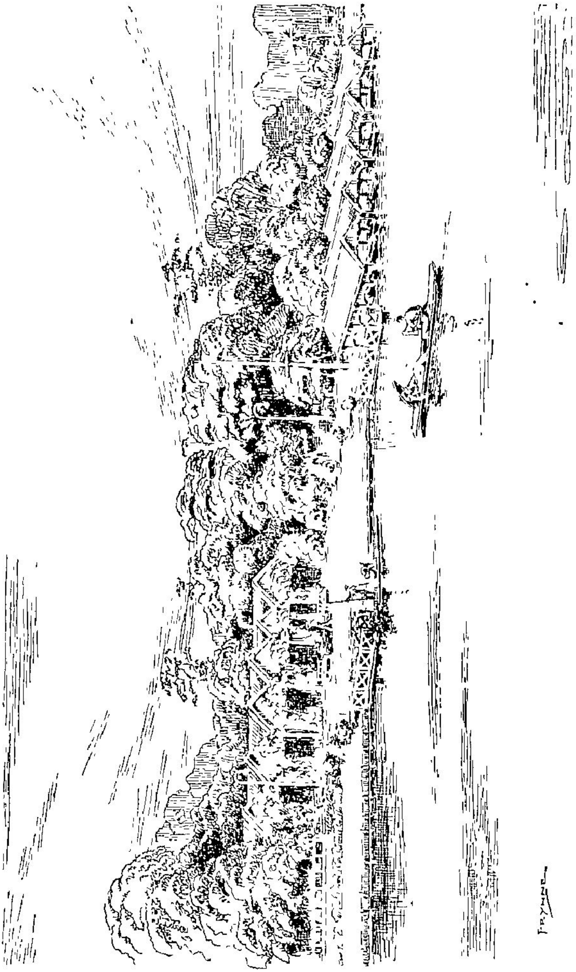
See those shapely doveheads mingled
Close in converse, bobbed and shingled,
Some poor innocent is singled
Out for prey.
Wretched man, he'll get no quarter
From those tongues, if set on slaughter.
For this dupe of the first water,
Let us pray.

Though those dovelips make men tremble,
Why should they their fear dissemble?
For they, too, you know, assemble

At the bar.

Helped with well-sustained imbibing,
Scandals there they keep describing,
(Talk of doveheads' diatribing)
Worse by far!

BOAT CLUB.



The East we see in cinema
And read about in books,
   Is not the East in which we have to live.
But boating on the Adyar
In moonlight hidden nooks
   Has something of our motherland to give.

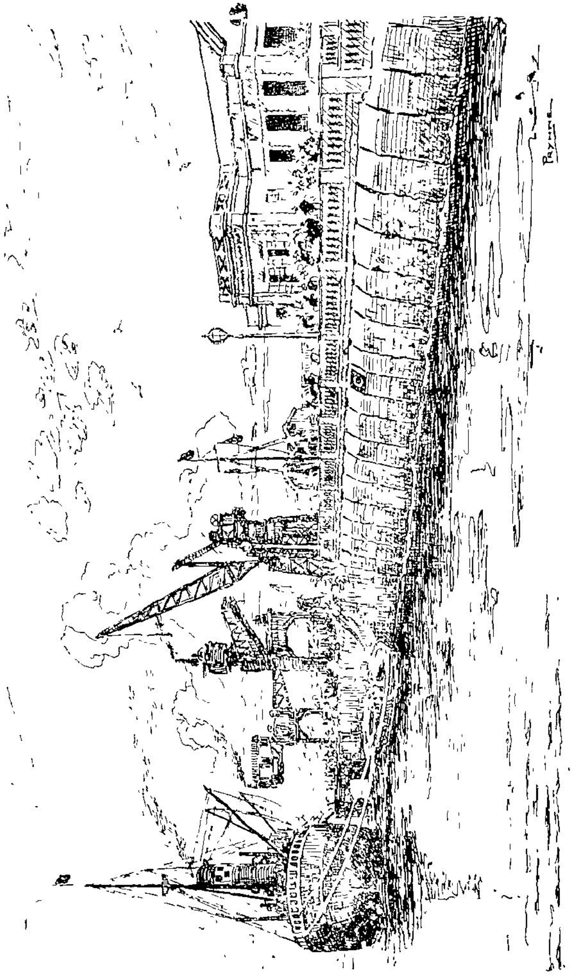
Romantic young Madrassis
Are quick to place their lips
   To taste the cup, which Nature now reveals,
By taking out their lassies
On quiet little trips
   In vessels not equipped with any keels.

Another type of drinker
Will satisfy his thirst
   By taking out a 'funny', 'whiff' or 'shell',

And row until you'd think a
Lung or vein would surely burst.
   He gets as much enjoyment strange to tell.

Ebrio con amore
The sun has always shone,
   And one must bow beneath the burning throne.
But there are hours of glory,
Just when the sun has gone,
   And then, Madras, you come into your own!

SAILING CLUB.

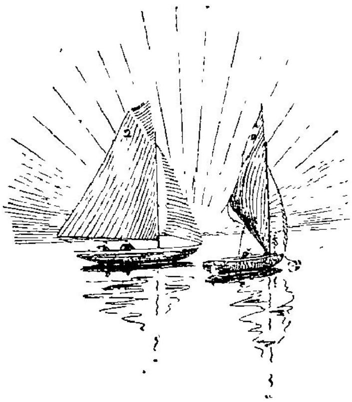


The Sailing Club is tucked away
   Within the Harbour wall.
And most of us go seldom there,
   And some don't go at all

For nautical fellows don't make a fuss
Of lazy land lubbers the likes of us.
But don't think that sailors don't like a crew
Of lady and sailor; (not more than two!)

On a moonlit night and a quiet sea
They like to behave like the likes of we:
For "sailors don't care" and "they all love Jack",
(And Jack has a knack, which we landsmen lack!)

The Sailing Club is tucked away
   Within the Harbour wall,
We hear of tales that come from there
   But some don't come at all.

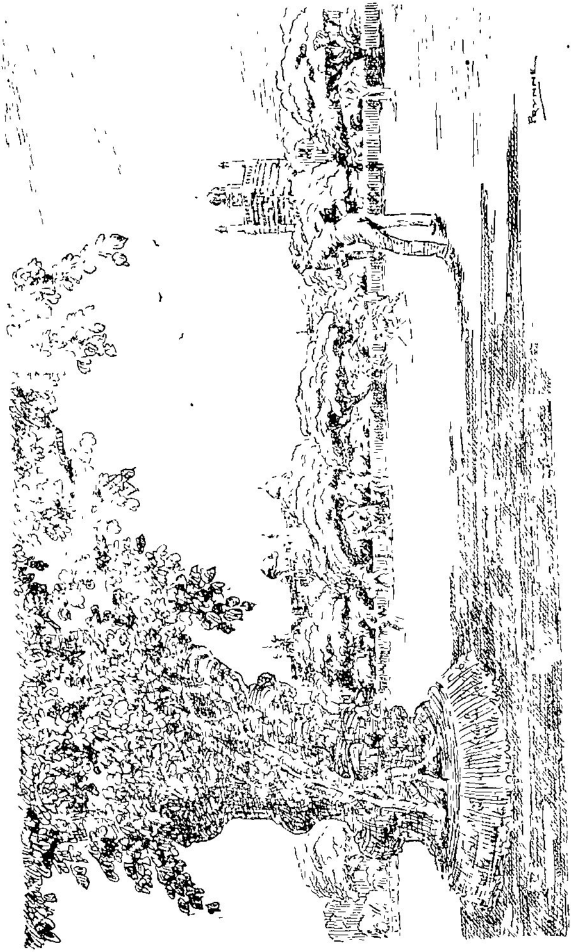


TENNIS.

In the days before the motor:
Days of Norfolk suit and boater,
Tea and Tennis was a pleasure,
To be played at languid leisure
By the girls and men together,
As became the tropic weather.

Nowadays its charm is ended;
Tennis play is fast and frenzied;
No more pat-ball—mild, but jolly:
Top-spin serve and chop-shot volley,
Tennis now is red-blood "he-play;"
Gone the hostess and the tea-tray!

CRICKET.


RYNNE

Although not a cradle of cricket like Lords,
    Chepauk has her name
    On the scrolls of the game
For she's taught its traditions to numberless hordes,
    From days of her Studds,
    To her younger bloods,
Her Partridges, Carricks, her Astes and her Wards.

HOCKEY.

Now hockey to the Indians
  Is quite a game that ranks
With cricket to the Englishmen,
  And baseball to the Yanks.

On ev'ry little maidan,
  Each minute of the day,
With twisted stick and coconut,
  The little badshas play.

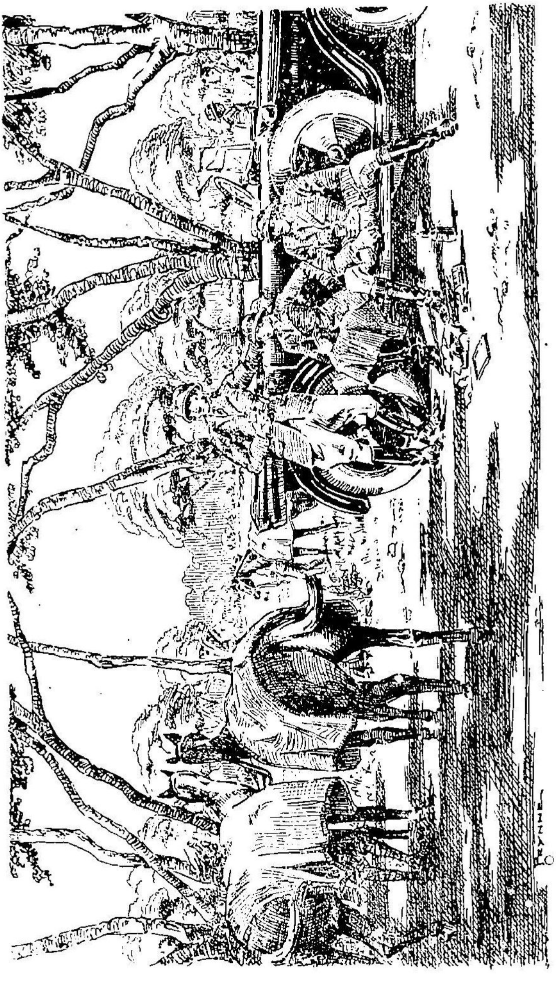
The white man taught the Aryan;
  The pupils now excel,
And yet they have a lot to learn
  Before they play it well.

The sudden rush of temper
  That knows no real control,
The down-at-heel demeanour
  That follows a lost goal.

The questioning of umpire,
  The purpose to repay;
Each is one full lesson
  That shall be learnt one day.

The lessons learnt—their hockey
  Should stand sans parallel:
When temper rules the brilliance,
  Where speed and eye excel.

HUNTING.



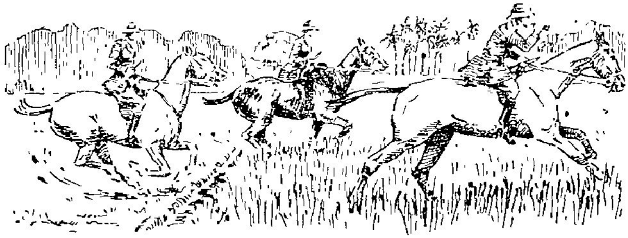
Yoicks! Tally-ho! and the Master's horn,
A cheerful field and a parky morn,
Beautiful ladies, all shingled and shorn.

Each attended by some gallant "sheikh",
With salmon pink coat, and lobster red cheek,
Charmer and charger splendidly sleek.

Cantering off to a hundred sounds,
The cracking of whips the music of hounds,
Jingling of harness; O, how the heart pounds!

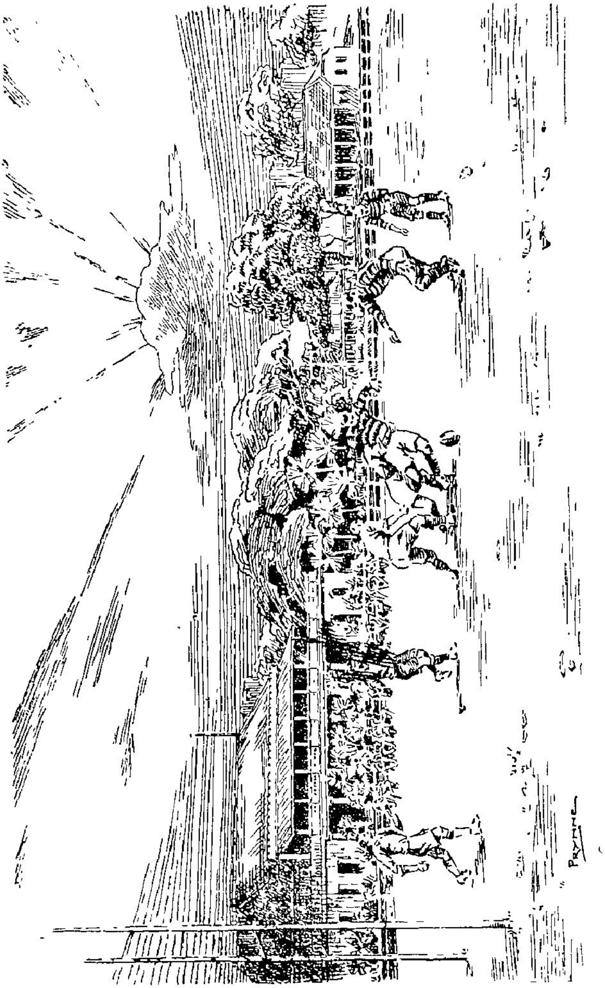
Two dozen men and a full-size pack,
A-tingle to launch their fierce attack,
On one poor innocent, mangy Jack.

Forrard, Hark Forrard! It's Paradise



Galloping over the poor man's rice,
A jolly good kill; then beer upon ice!

RUGGER.


PRYNNE

Love of a game of glorious worth
Isn't afraid of a sun-baked earth.

What of the heat and the risks that lurk
Round strenuous play on a full day's work.

Each season ends with a harvest grim,

Of fractured bone or twisted limb.

The game goes on, but it claims its price,
And her slaves don't grudge the sacrifice.

Love of the game can hold in serf
Hundreds who laugh at an iron turf!

GOLF.

I don't care much for golfing in the plains,
  I break too many clubs upon the ground.
Unless the earth is softened by the rains,
  And when the rainy season has come round;
So many other sports entice me off.
And so I do not play a lot of Golf!

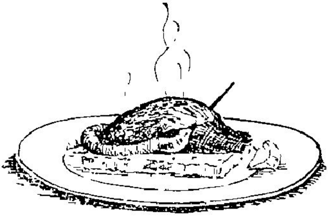
Madras has many lovers of the game.
  Who regularly chase the little ball
From brown to brown: rejoicing all the same
  That browns are better than no greens at all!
At Adyar or at the Gym: but best,
Is twelve-hole Guindy on the Day of Rest.

A. F. I.

The thoughtless ignoramus doesn't pause to reason why,
With tongue in cheek, he sluggishly regards the A.F.I.
It is, though times have greatly changed, because he doesn't
think
The Pen's not altogether Empire's all-abiding link.

SNIPE SHOOTING.

From the mountains of Tibet,
  Flying reckless of their fate,
To the far Carnatic Coast,
  To a hot Madrassi plate,
Served upon a piece of toast.
    Poor little snipe!



Blame the Nimrods of the South
  Rising early for shikar,
Tramping through the sodden fields.
  Gun in hand (and beer in car!).
Shooting what the paddy yields.
      Poor little snipe!